

BEING UNABLE TO CONDUCT BRUCKNER: GENDER
DISCRIMINATION IN THE CLASSICAL
CONDUCTING WORLD

by

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A THESIS

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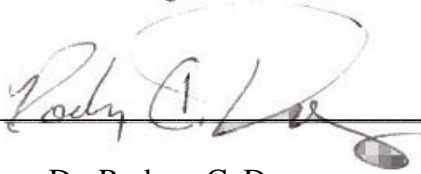
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Title: Being Unable to Conduct Bruckner: Gender Discrimination in the Classical
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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rodney C. Dorsey", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Rodney C. Dorsey

Classical music conductors throughout time have overwhelmingly been white and male and this is not due to chance. It has been only in the past thirty years that women have been able to become conductors, which is traditionally seen as a leadership role in the orchestra. This thesis looks to understand how women have historically been excluded from conducting and closely examines the lives of four women who broke through the glass ceiling to see how they can become models for today's female conductors. Women of color, women in composition, and women in jazz are also studied. Solutions to increase equality in the conducting field are discussed at the conclusion.

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Introduction

Classical music is frequently touted as the height of culture. Wolfgang Mozart, Ludwig von Beethoven, and Johann Sebastian Bach are considered as great as Vincent van Gogh, Michelangelo, and Pablo Picasso. Classical music surpasses popular music in its timelessness and is revered as almost holy, as audience members sit quietly in darkness with cell phones turned off, giving their entire focus for hours to the orchestra. Everyone, from the young to the old, listens to music. Music, as it is commonly said, transcends language and educational barriers. It can be assumed, therefore, that as listeners are from all cultures and genders, anyone from any culture and of any gender can play music.

Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, classical music seems to exist almost exclusively for a white male audience. The most performed works in American orchestras in 2014 were written by George Frideric Handel, Beethoven, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Antonín Dvořák, Richard Strauss, and Franz Schubert, all white, European, and male.¹ In the United States, 90.8% of current music directors and head conductors of orchestras are male and 79.5% of current associate, assistant, resident, youth orchestra, pops, and chorus conductors are male.² On average, the top 20 orchestras in the United States consist of 63% male musicians and 37% female musicians.³ This is in a country where 56.7% of women are in the workforce.⁴ It is

¹ "Classical Music in 2014: The Year in Statistics." *Bachtrack*, 2015.

² Data from The League of American Orchestras. Raw data. New York. Gathered by request.

³ Suby Raman. "Graphing Gender in America's Top Orchestras." Suby Raman: Composer, Programmer, Also Likes Bubbles (blog), November 18, 2014.

⁴ "Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Ethnicity." *United States Department of Labor*, 2015.

evident from these statistics that there is an issue regarding gender discrimination in classical music. If that were not the case, the number of male and female musicians and conductors would number around 50% for each gender, representative of workforce participation today.

This thesis will examine reasons why there are significantly fewer women than men in classical music. Conductors are highlighted in this work as the conductor is typically seen as the face of the orchestra. They appear in interviews and press releases about the orchestra, are usually featured in the banner of the orchestra's website, and lead educational and fundraising events for the orchestra. A conductor is the leader of the orchestra in more ways than one. Ideally, male and female conductors should be in about equal balance.

However, men significantly outnumber women in today's conducting climate. As with all significant statistics, this is not due to chance. This thesis will explore why there are more men than women by examining the voices of those within the industry and forming solutions as to how there can be more female conductors in the future. The first main section will focus on male conductors, educators, critics, and producers who discuss the lack of women conductors in interviews. The interviews will be dissected through a larger lens backed by research to examine negative stereotypes and assumptions women face in other careers. These interviews and research will establish a historical framework so the reader can understand what women face when they want to become conductors.

Yet just as women are held back from achieving their career goals, there are women who have broken the mold. Four of these women include Marin Alsop,

conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Alondra de la Parra, conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Diane Wittry, music director and conductor of the Allentown Symphony, and Laura Jackson, conductor of the Reno Philharmonic. Each of these women will be viewed with a different lens based on their conducting career choices to see how they through broke the glass ceiling, whether by being the first woman to do so, a woman of color, a woman composer, or a woman anyone can look up to.

This thesis not only aims to educate both men and women on the hidden sexism within orchestra leadership, but to also discover gains women have made in recent history. The scope will cover not only conducting, but issues people of color face in the field, the importance of job referrals and role models, issues women have had to face in the compositional world, and unique opportunities women have today. At the conclusion of this thesis, the reader will know of centuries-old assumptions that hold women back, oppressions women face in similar fields, and the outlook for women conductors today.

Part 1: Background

This section establishes the gender background of conducting; namely, that men do not have the same difficulties women do when securing a conducting career. Men such as the ones presented here hold women back from attaining the appropriate education to become a conductor or discriminate against women in the workforce and treat them differently than men. These men vary in career from conductors, educators, critics, and producers, but they all hold women back in unique ways.

Vasily Petrenko

Vasily Petrenko is the chief conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic, principal guest conductor of the Mikhailovsky Theatre, and principal conductor of the National Youth Orchestra in Britain. He has also worked in the United States with the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, and San Francisco Symphony.⁵ His US engagements alone rank him highly in terms of conductors and his positions in European orchestras further solidify his importance in the orchestral world. In 2013, he stated his views on female conductors in a now famous interview with *Aftenposten*, a Norwegian paper:

Vasily Petrenko...has provoked outrage by claiming that orchestras "react better when they have a man in front of them" and that "a cute girl on a podium means that musicians think about other things".

When are faced with a man there are less erotic distractions, and with less sexual energy the musicians can "focus on the music", he told Norwegian paper *Aftenposten*.

Women also find it difficult to "be as dedicated as is demanded in the business" when they start having families, he added.⁶

It is clear that he objectifies women by focusing on their looks over what they are there to do, in this case lead an orchestra. According to this interview, he believes musicians would not be able to focus on the music if a "cute" girl conducts it. He dulls the intelligence of the men in his orchestras by saying a woman on the podium will make men too distracted to focus. Men in this field or any career are obviously smart and

⁵ "Vasily Petrenko - Bio," Naxos Records.

⁶ Hayley Dixon, "'Men Make Better Conductors', Says Vasily Petrenko," The Telegraph, September 03, 2013.

well-disciplined in order to perform their work well. To say they can be so easily distracted is as offensive as his objectifying remarks towards women.

In addition, his statement on *when* and not *if* women “start having families” as he puts it is additionally degrading towards women. By saying this, he assumes all women will eventually have a family. Petrenko makes the assumption that they will then leave the classical music business because they will find challenging to “be as dedicated as is demanded in the music business.” He does not state the same concern with a man that has a family.

His statement supports antique views of the stay-at-home mother. This view no longer reflects reality. 75% of women with professional or graduate degrees give birth and remain in the labor force and 60% of those women work full time.⁷ All conductors must have a graduate degree in conducting at the minimum to be considered for a position, so this statistic applies to the conducting field. Yet professional women whether childless or with children constantly get dragged down by the idea that they will eventually leave the workforce due to child care. Conversely, men with children do not face this stereotype and in fact, make more money than single men even when accounting for work experience.⁸ Assuming that a woman will become a stay-at-home mother is an old-fashioned view Petrenko holds, but his view holds present-day women back. He thinks every woman will become a mother and stay home with her children and this may influence his hiring practices. He may be more reluctant to hire a woman

⁷ United States of America, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, *Fertility of American Women: 2010 - Detailed Tables* (2010). Table 6.

⁸ Martha S. Hill, "The Wage Effects of Marital Status and Children," *The Journal of Human Resources* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1979), doi:10.2307/145325.

musician or guest conductor when he thinks she will leave the profession sooner than a man.

In his defense, Petrenko grew up in Russia where he states that female conductors are rare. He said as such in a subsequent interview:

“We were saying that because a woman conductor is still quite a rarity at the moment, their appearance at the podium, because of the historical background, always has some emotions reflected in the orchestra,” [Petrenko states.]...Petrenko says he was referring to Russia, where female conductors are still virtually unknown. He seems to mean that a woman is such an unfamiliar sight on the podium that the musicians may find it difficult to accept her authority, or be disconcerted by her sexuality.⁹

Although Russian female conductors are quite hard to find, one conductor was so famous she had a cosmic rock formation named after her. Veronika Dudarova led the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra from 1947 to 1989 and afterwards formed the Symphony Orchestra of Russia. She premiered a musical setting of President Leonard Brezhnev’s memoirs and even starred in a couple of movies.¹⁰ While it is understandable that Petrenko is unable to remember every conductor from Russia, the fact that Dudarova was so famous in her time should make her easy to remember. His lapse in memory may instead be due to marginalizing, where his teachers intentionally left her out of conducting history and she becomes forgotten, leading Petrenko to believe that a woman conducting is an outlandish notion.

He continued in this interview to offer insight on why he thinks a “pretty girl” is distracting, as he has been approached romantically in rehearsals before:

⁹ Adam Sweeting, "Petrenko: I Don't Believe Women Conductors Are a Distraction," The Telegraph, May 8, 2014.

¹⁰ "Obituaries: Veronika Dudarova," The Telegraph, February 26, 2009.

“I have personally faced such a thing quite a few times...but I wasn’t interested in it. After a rehearsal you see someone is coming to you. Then the next day you rehearse with the same people and you see their eyes, and you know exactly what’s going on. You know that the mind of such a person is not fully in music, and those things happen.”¹¹

He is considered to be one of the more attractive conductors of the present day and has dealt with advances before. Yet he does not think of his looks as a distraction, so why must he assume something of that nature to women conductors? In this statement, he says that he moves on and focuses on the music even if the musician does not. Why does he assume then that a woman, unlike him, would be unable to move on from a romantic advance? He seems to be hypocritical as he thinks a woman’s beauty leads to bad orchestral playing yet is not fazed by his own beauty. These interviews are done so recently that it is quite unlikely his views have changed since. Unfortunately, a man like this in such a powerful position makes breaking the glass ceiling of conducting for women especially outside of the United States a challenge.

¹¹ Sweeting, “Petrenko: I Don’t Believe Women Conductors Are A Distraction.”

Yuri Termirkanov

Yuri Temirkanov is considered to be “one of the 21st century’s most accomplished and challenging conductors.”¹² Prior to his current appointment at the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, he was the principal conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. His other conducting jobs included the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Leningrad Symphony Orchestra, and the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.¹³ However, he is an active presence in holding women back in his profession as shown in this portion of a 2013 interview from the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*:

Q: In your opinion, could a woman conduct?

A: In my view, no.

Q: Why not?

A: I don’t know if it’s God’s will, or nature’s, that women give birth and men do not. That’s something that no one takes offense at. But if you say that a woman can’t conduct, then everyone’s offended. As Marx said, in response to the question “What’s your favorite virtue in a woman?”— “Weakness.” And this is correct. The important thing is, a woman should be beautiful, likable, attractive. Musicians will look at her and be distracted from the music!

Q: Why? There are women in the orchestra; people indifferent to a women’s charms. Besides, how many times would you be enraptured by appearances? After all, it’s something you tire of, and switch to the heart of the question. Statistically, of course, there are women conductors.

A: Yes, they do exist.

Q: Nevertheless, you maintain that these are less than women, or less than conductors.

A: No, simply that in my opinion, it’s counter to nature.

Q: And what is it in the conductor’s profession that runs counter to a woman’s nature? That’s counter to the essence of the conductor’s profession?

A: The essence of the conductor’s profession is strength. The essence of a woman is weakness.

¹² Erik Eriksson, “Yuri Termikanov – Biography,” AllMusic: Yuri Termikanov.

¹³ Eriksson, “Yuri Termikanov – Biography.”

Q: Perhaps the essence of the conductor's profession is to understand the intent of the composer and lead him all this army of musicians?

A: Yes, a woman cannot be worse than men to understand the author's intention, but the next step of leading the musicians, a woman cannot do. At least I have not seen of such an instance.¹⁴

Termirkanov falls back on a common ancient argument that women and men are required to have certain roles because of what “nature” prescribed them. Although he is correct in that women are physically able to give birth and men are not, that is where the “nature” argument ends. Humans have designated further roles such as caretaker, nurse, and teacher to women by saying these roles are what women “best fit into” but the reality is these categories are a social construct. Termirkanov and others of his ilk wish to assign roles to genders, but women perform just as well as men on average in any skill.¹⁵ Any difference later in life can be attributed to these social constructs as women are told they are “better” at caregiving than men and men are told they are “better” than women in leadership positions.

Termirkanov also further objectifies and holds women to a different standard than men, saying that women must be “beautiful, likable, attractive” and then saying that these qualities, which are necessary to him, will prevent musicians from learning the music. Holding women but not men to a standard of physical beauty is sexist and ridiculous, since the profession of conducting concerns the beauty of sound, not beauty of the face. Similarly, to what Petrenko said, Termirkanov also insults musicians in orchestras by saying that they can be so easily distracted by beauty and that a pretty face

¹⁴ Alena Ganchikovoу, "Юрий Темирканов: "Дирижер-женщина – это противостоестественно..." / Культура / Независимая газета, October 9, 2012. Translated from Russian to English.

¹⁵ "Think Again: Men and Women Share Cognitive Skills," Psychology: Science in Action, August 2014.

prevents them from making music. As he and Petrenko should know, musicians spend their entire lives honing their focus to achieve mastery of their instrument. The idea that all it takes for a musician to lose decades of training is an attractive visage is ludicrous considering the rigorous practice musicians must endure to become professionals.

The comments in this interview are similar to statements made by Petrenko and not without coincidence. Petrenko once studied under Termirkanov and it appears Petrenko learned much, at least in regards to similar views on gender roles. The issue, however, is not so much Termirkanov's views but the influence he has in the current orchestral sphere and on further generations of conductors such as Petrenko. By spreading misogynist views such as these to his pupils, Termirkanov is not only holding women in his own orchestra or geographical area back, but women who wish to study under his pupils.

Termirkanov is considered to be one of the leading maestros in the world. What he says influences not only his pupils, but patrons who admire him, audience members who flock to his concerts, and arts administrators and staff who work with him. Because he can command so much attention in the classical world, comments such as these made in this interview can have hazardous consequences for women conductors.

Bruno Mantovani

Bruno Mantovani is the headmaster of the Paris Conservatoire, France's premier music college. Past students of the Conservatoire have included Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, defining composers of the Impressionist era of classical music. Mantovani is also an accomplished conductor, leading orchestras with other notable conductors including Pierre Boulez and Susanna Mälkki and collaborating with prestigious orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, BBC London Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, and Radio Symphony Orchestra of Vienna. He has received the Claudio Abbado prize from the Berlin Philharmonic among other honors.¹⁶ In a 2013 interview he expressed how he feels about women conducting:

As you know, the aims of an orchestra director, of a conductor, are complicated. We obviously encourage everyone to apply to join the conducting class so that we have as many conductors as possible to provide for French and international orchestras, but women aren't necessarily interested...There is also the problem of maternity that raises its head; a woman who wants to have children will have a hard time having a career as a conductor, which can change tack abruptly overnight for several months...There is also sometimes even a physiological restraint. The profession of a conductor is a profession that is particularly testing physically; sometimes women are discouraged by the very physical aspect: conducting, taking a plane, taking another plane, conducting again...For me, the only discrimination, no matter in which discipline, is the entrance exam or competition.¹⁷

His comments at the end of this statement reinforce the negative stereotype that women are weak. Both Mantovani and Termirkanov seem to believe what Termirkanov stated Karl Marx said: "the essence of a woman is weakness." They rely on the assumption that women are more likely to have less muscle mass and use the stereotype

¹⁶ "Bruno Mantovani - Biography." Bruno Mantovani.

¹⁷ Chris Swithinbank, "Bruno Mantovani on Female Conductors," Chris Swithinbank, Composer, October 06, 2013.

of physical weakness to make further assumptions on a woman's mental and emotional strength, even suggesting she is unable to take a plane for her career as Mantovani just stated above. As demonstrated in the discussions of Petrenko's and Termirkanov's interviews, that claim is not rooted in fact.

Mantovani discusses the issue of having children. He says, similar to Petrenko, that women who have children will have a difficult time as a conductor. Although there is the possibility of an alternative caregiver, he is correct in assuming that the main caregiving responsibilities are more likely to fall to the woman in a heterosexual relationship. According to the Pew Research Center, mothers with children under age 18 were three times as likely as fathers to say that being a working parent made it harder for them to advance in their career. Women are also twice as likely as men to reduce their working hours to care for a child or ailing family member.¹⁸ This is because women are still expected to be the main caretaker of children in the family, preventing them from experiencing personal fulfillment in their careers. When someone takes time off their work to focus on family or children, their career suffers. Classical music is no exception. However, when Mantovani and other conductors assume that all women will eventually have children and therefore leave the workforce, that encroaches into sexism.

Although he claims in his interview to be nondiscriminatory in his recruiting practice for the Conservatoire, he is probably more likely to pick a male student to receive an acceptance letter over a female one because he assumes the female student

¹⁸ Kim Parker, "Despite Progress, Women Still Bear Heavier Load than Men in Balancing Work and Family," Pew Research Center, March 10, 2015

will have children and drop out of her career or schooling. Additionally, he will assume the male student will continue in a career and advance Mantovani's name through the Conservatoire, leading Mantovani to pick the prospective male student over the female student for his school.

This correlates with a 2012 study on gender biases. When a member of a scientific faculty was faced with two identical résumés with the only difference being a feminine or masculine name, the résumé with the masculine name was chosen because the feminine named resume was viewed as less competent.¹⁹ These biases play out in real life as perceived female weakness hurts women's chances of getting into prestigious schools such as the Paris Conservatoire and having a fulfilling conducting career.

After the criticism that followed this interview, Mantovani stated that he has conducted alongside women including Susanna Mälkki, that he does accept women into his school, women have made great advances in the conducting world, and stresses that his reasoning for fewer women conducting are because of maternity.²⁰ While his first three statements are correct, women are not forsaking conducting due to maternity alone. The fact of the matter is that men in powerful positions including Mantovani, Termirkanov, and Petrenko state that women will have children and want to quit their careers and that women are too weak to take on the responsibilities of the job. With this maternal stereotype in their brains, men such as Mantovani will be more likely to pick a male student because he will believe that the male student will advance in his career

¹⁹ Corinne A. Moss-Racusin et al., "Science Faculty's Subtle Gender Biases Favor Male Students," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109, no. 41.

²⁰ Swithinbank, "Bruno Mantovani on Female Conductors."

whether or not that male student has a family. Erasing the “inevitable caregiver” stereotype women face promises a step toward equality.

Anthony Tommasini

The interviews discussed previously examined how male conductors deny female conductors from achieving their dreams, but those outside the classical music sphere are accountable as well for contributing to the absence of female conductors. Anthony Tommasini is the chief music critic of *The New York Times*. When Marin Alsop was hired as the conductor of Baltimore Symphony he wondered if her sexuality helped fuel her rise to the position:

There can be a seductive element to conducting. Think of the kinetic young Leonard Bernstein, the suave Herbert von Karajan, the exotic and scruffy Valery Gergiev. Ms. Alsop is a dynamo on the podium, an incisive technician who moves and grooves much like Bernstein, her mentor. Might male orchestral players (and even some female ones) be more comfortable with an electrifying woman on the podium if she is known to be a lesbian?²¹

Tommasini needlessly sexualizes conducting. Conductors do not conduct in a way that is intentionally sexual; on the contrary, the vast majority of them wear long sleeves and formal evening wear to conduct. Alsop is no exception to this rule and typically wears long sleeves with red trim. This paragraph in his article is degrading towards both male and female conductors because he assumes “seductiveness” when conductors are simply doing their job.

The other issue with this statement is that it assumes Alsop got her current position as music director because she is interested in women. This is a remark of a

²¹ Anthony Tommasini, "A One-Woman Vanguard," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2007.

similar nature as stated in conductors previously discussed, where a heterosexual “pretty girl” on the podium may prove “too distracting” to musicians. According to Tommasini, her homosexuality and inability to be attracted to most of the musicians in the orchestra prevents this “distraction” from happening. As stated earlier, to think that musicians and conductors, who spend decades honing their craft, can be so easily distracted by someone they are romantically attracted to is a ridiculous idea. Alsop is a mature conductor who has never allowed a romantic relationship distract from her work and it is safe to assume that of her orchestral musicians as well. Despite Tommasini being the chief music critic of the New York Times, he does not seem to have an accurate picture of what an orchestral job entails according to this paragraph.

Unfortunately, his claim regarding men taking Alsop more seriously because she is a lesbian reflects recent popular opinion. In a 2014 survey conducted in America, heterosexual men reported being more comfortable with lesbians than with gay men.²² Although this study was conducted prior to legalized gay marriage in the United States in 2015, public opinion takes some time to change. Unlike the conductors’ views stated earlier that are clearly sexist, problematic views of homosexual women in leadership positions appears to be a lesser-known discrimination. Heterosexual men might state they are “uncomfortable” with homosexual women but are consciously unsure as to why they feel that way.

This may be instinctively tied to heterosexual men’s views on attractiveness in heterosexual women. In a 2009 study, heterosexual men scored lower on a word test

²² Martin A. Monto and Jessica Supinski, "Discomfort With Homosexuality: A New Measure Captures Differences in Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no. 6.

when tested by a heterosexual woman they considered beautiful versus a woman considered of average beauty. Conversely, heterosexual women did not score lower on the same test when tested by a heterosexual man they considered attractive.²³ It appears from this study and the public opinion survey stated earlier that in fact it would be wiser for women of any sexuality to lead and be in orchestras, since it seems heterosexual men are the ones to hold negative views towards different sexualities and be more easily distracted by women than the reverse.

However, studies such as these may be held as discriminatory towards men if policy makers and administrators use studies such as these to influence hiring practices and policy. Rather, these should be brought to light so heterosexual men can be aware of possible shortcomings and consciously adjust their perspective as necessary if need be. While Tommasini's remarks on Alsop's sexuality is discriminatory and needlessly sexualizes conductors, people should be aware of their possible biases. Tommasini himself for example should be aware of his bias towards sexualizing conductors and remember that the conductor's job is to lead the musicians and their gestures reflect that, not any sort of "seductive" movements towards the audience as he seems to suggest.

²³ Johan C. Karremans et al., "Interacting with Women Can Impair Men's Cognitive Functioning," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 4.

Herbert von Karajan

No conversation on conductors, male, female, or otherwise, could be complete without discussing Herbert von Karajan. During his lifetime Karajan produced what were the most influential recordings of any conductor. He was appointed the principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic in 1956 and commanded the global orchestral sphere until 1989 when he retired. Concerts he conducted “remained unmissable events – if you were fortunate enough to get a ticket.”²⁴ He was so influential in his time that younger musicians and conductors he praised, including Anne-Sophie Mutter, Claudio Abbado, and Seiji Ozawa, reached stardom almost instantly after he discovered them.²⁵

Karajan also attempted to boost the career of the clarinetist Sabine Meyer, but unfortunately the results were disastrous. Karajan invited Meyer on the Berlin Philharmonic’s US tour in 1984 after he heard her play in the Bavarian Radio Orchestra. Unfortunately, the orchestra refused to have her on as a permanent member, voting against it by saying “she did not integrate well into the orchestra.”²⁶ Meyer gives a different story. She said she have suffered harassment by the male members of the orchestra, such as the other members sliding their chairs away from her in rehearsals. Since leaving the orchestra she refuses to talk about the treatment she endured.²⁷ Karajan was so upset over the orchestra’s treatment of her that he left the Berlin Phil after a thirty-year career. Meyer has since had a career as the world’s leading clarinet

²⁴ Martin Kettle, "Echoes of the Eternal Seducer," *The Guardian*, April 09, 2008.

²⁵ "The Era of Herbert Von Karajan," *History of the Berliner Philharmoniker*.

²⁶ "Karajan and Orchestra Clash Over Clarinetist." *The New York Times*. January 8, 1983.

²⁷ William Osborne, "Art Is Just an Excuse," *Gender Bias In International Orchestras*, October 1996.

soloist, performing in over three hundred orchestras internationally. She currently teaches in the Hochschule für Musik in Lübeck, Germany.²⁸

Karajan is notable in the orchestra's treatment of Meyer because he resigned after the orchestra refused to work with her. He was considered one of if not the most famous and influential conductor in the past century. To have a person of such magnitude resign over a blatant act of sexism from the orchestra brought the matter to light. Unlike the previous conductors discussed, the orchestra musicians were the ones holding back equality.

In interviews seven years after Meyer's departure with members of the Berlin Philharmonic and a peer orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, the musicians claimed that women defiled the so-called quality of the music:

"The way we make music here is not only a technical ability, but also something that has a lot to do with the soul...if one thinks that the world should function by quota regulations, then it is naturally irritating that we are a group of white skinned male musicians that perform exclusively the music of white skinned male composers... I am convinced that it is worthwhile to accept this racist and sexist irritation, because something produced by a superficial understanding of human rights would not have the same standards."²⁹

This is a statement from Helmut Zaerther, a second violinist in the Vienna Philharmonic, an orchestra that did not accept female members in its ranks until 1997. Since the Vienna Phil and Berlin Phil are similarly ranked, it can be assumed the members of the Berlin Phil felt about the same and this was why they shunned Sabine Meyer. They claim to advocate for purity of music and therefore must be "pure" in the

²⁸ "Biography - Sabine Meyer." Sabine Meyer.

²⁹ William Osborne, "Art Is Just an Excuse: Gender Bias in International Orchestras," *International Alliance for Women in Music*, October 1996.

orchestra makeup with one gender and one race. This reeks of white supremacy. In fact, the Berlin Philharmonic was involved in the Nazi party during World War II. While the orchestra aligned with the Nazis for budgetary reasons, twenty members of the orchestra voluntarily joined the Nazi party at the time.³⁰ Disguising notions of gender or racial superiority under creating “perfect” art or even under the practical matter of funding does not dismiss the racist and sexist feelings the orchestra members displayed. Unfortunately, as these musicians were role models and teachers, they undoubtedly persuaded many women and people of color of the time to think that a career in music was impossible for them.

Today the Berlin Philharmonic has improved their treatment towards women but they still are not representative. For example, in the entire woodwind, brass, and percussion sections there are exactly two female players. While Sarah Willis, the female horn player, states that “she has never been witness to any sexist behaviors within [the orchestra] – either day-to-day or during auditions,”³¹ the fact still remains that the orchestra did not accept a woman into the brass section until 2001. Today, only 18 of 126 members in the orchestra are women and the majority of women are in the string section. The idea that masculinity is superior still dominates and prevents women from getting in the Berlin Philharmonic and other orchestras as shown not only in the treatment of Sabine Meyer, but also the recent interviews with European conductors presented prior. Acceptance of women as musicians on par with men and dispelling the

³⁰ Verena Nees, "Das Reichsorchester—The Berlin Philharmonic and the Nazis," World Socialist Web Site, December 18, 2007.

³¹ Miranda Kiek, "Where Are All the Female Musicians?" The Independent, November 23, 2012.

sexist notion of “purity” is vital to encourage more women to perform and help women achieve equality in the orchestra.

Critics of Deborah Voigt and Tara Erraught

Women have not only been rejected from the classical sphere because of their gender; female opera singers have had to deal with a double standard from male directors and critics. The soprano Deborah Voigt experienced discrimination over her weight in an audition in 1996 for Richard Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*:

She sang for the maestro in a rehearsal room in London and at the end of the session he told her he was delighted by what he had heard.

“That was beautiful. You’d be a great Isolde,” he said.

Voigt assumed the part was hers. But then Solti rose from his desk and walked over to her.

“Why are you so fat?” he said in a matter-of-fact voice. “Is it the food?” Before Voigt could recover her composure, he added: “If you lose weight by the time I see you for Beethoven’s Ninth, you can have the job.”³²

This audition was for a CD recording, not for a performance. She would not be seen by anyone singing this role.

Later in 2004 she was rejected from a production of Richard Strauss’s *Ariadne* because she was considered too fat for the role, as the producer had insisted on a little black dress for the costume and refused to have it altered or changed for her body shape. At the time, she weighed around 300 pounds.³³ These comments led her to have gastric bypass surgery and she has since lost more than half her starting weight.

³² Ed Pilkington, "Deborah Voigt: 'When I Walked Onstage, You Saw Addiction,'" *The Guardian*, February 17, 2015.

³³ "Voigt Fired from Covent Garden *Ariadne* For Weight," *Opera News*, March 2004.

More recently in 2014, mezzo-soprano Tara Erraught was attacked by music critics on her weight in the Glyndebourne's production of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Despite her singing "with vibrant assurance," Rupert Christiansen of *The Telegraph* states she is "dumpy of stature" and asks if the costumer of the production is "simply trying to make the best of her intractable physique."³⁴ Andrew Clements of *The Guardian* says in his review that "it is hard to imagine this stocky Octavian as this willowy woman's plausible lover."³⁵ Andrew Clark of the *Financial Times* calls Erraught "a chubby bundle of puppy-fat" while the other slim main actresses are praised for their performances.³⁶ It should be noted that all of these music critics are male.

Clearly, this is weight discrimination towards women in opera. While women such as Erraught and Voigt are criticized for their weight and denied roles, the famous male tenor Luciano Pavarotti was notable for being large at the end of his career and yet was never rejected a role for being too heavy. On the contrary, the audience was "delirious" to hear him sing.³⁷ He is not an exception to the rule for male singers; after Voigt lost weight and was cast as Brünnhilde in Richard Wagner's *Walküre*, her stage father Bryn Terfel was remarked by the New York Times as being "a big, strong man" but was not criticized for his size or vocal talent.³⁸ Male opera singers can be heavy or

³⁴ Rupert Christiansen, "Glyndebourne 2014: Der Rosenkavalier, Review," *The Telegraph*, May 18, 2014.

³⁵ Andrew Clements, "Der Rosenkavalier Review – New Glyndebourne Staging Lacks Emotion," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2014.

³⁶ Andrew Clark, "Der Rosenkavalier, Glyndebourne, East Sussex, UK – Review," *Financial Times*, May 19, 2014.

³⁷ Sudip Bose, "Criticized for Her Weight, Opera Star Deborah Voigt Speaks up," *Washington Post*, February 20, 2015.

³⁸ Anthony Tommasini, "Brünnhilde's Trials Beyond Wagner's Dreams," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2011.

slim and they still get roles and are mainly judged by singing ability. However, female opera singers seem to be more likely to be judged on their size even when in popular culture there is a prevailing stereotype that female opera singers are quite heavy.

Ideals of beauty and female roles in opera contribute strongly as to why heavier women encounter negative perceptions and job rejections based on weight. For women, roles in opera are limited and defined by the relationship to the male character. For example, Gilda in Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* is the daughter of the main male character, is referenced by her sexual purity, and is later kidnapped, leaving the male characters to save her and declare love for her.³⁹ Gilda is defined only by the men's relationship to her, whether as a daughter, a sexual conquest, or love interest. Without them, she does not exist. The men in the story on the other hand are counts, dukes, assassins, and jesters. They can independently exist in Verdi's universe with their royal status and job titles. They are not defined solely by relationship to the other characters.

In another famous opera, Wolfgang Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, the two female characters begin in the opera as engaged to two men who have been summoned to war. The other main male character then spends the rest of the opera testing the women to see if they are faithful to their husbands.⁴⁰ These women are again defined only as fiancés to men. It is unknown if they have jobs, interests, or other friends. The men, however, have a career as they travel off to war or taunt the women. The man left behind to oversee the women can go back to his job when he is done tricking the women, but the women have no choice but to wait for the men to return.

³⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Rigoletto," accessed June 30, 2016.

⁴⁰ "All Women Are Like That: Sexism in Mozart's 'Così fan tutte,'" FEM, 2011.

These are two examples in a sea of countless female roles, many defined similarly by their purity, marriage, or motherhood status. The women are seen as accessories to the male main characters, referenced by their sexual “purity” and faithfulness for marriage. A more detailed analysis of female characters in opera is beyond the scope of this thesis, but because overall in opera their only role is to wed and bear children, producers of these productions tend to want to make conventionally beautiful singers play these characters so the audience understands from the moment they walk on the stage why the male characters want to wed them. However, conventional attractiveness means these singers have to be small and skinny.

Female singers who do not fit the roles visually do not get the roles, despite years of training and musical excellence. Conventional standards of beauty still hold weight, more so than musical talent. This is true even in recordings, when Voigt was denied a role in an audio production of *Tristan and Isolde* as stated earlier. No one would even look at her while singing the role and yet she was denied simply because she does not fit into what male producers and directors think is conventionally attractive.

Female opera singers train for years, if not decades, to perfect their art and when they are denied a career based on how they look, this is discrimination. As roles for women in opera are generally submissive characters defined by the men in the story, they have to adhere to sexist standards in order to play sexist roles. Men do not have to be held to these standards as they are not solely defined by sexual “purity” and marriage to other characters in the story.

Whether or not these roles should change is another argument altogether due to their historical and musical significance, but women should be judged on their ability to sing and perform these roles, not how well they fit into a little black dress.

Leonard Slatkin

Unfortunately, weight discrimination does exist in the classical music realm albeit in smaller amounts than in opera. Leonard Slatkin, a conductor from the United States, made these remarks in 2000 in an interview:

“I tend to favor covered arms, especially among the violinists. You don’t want to see too much flapping about...then there’s the problem of women in trousers. If you’re slightly heavy in the rear end department, it does not look too good. Of course, not everyone acknowledges that and no one’s going to tell them, which is why we need an across-the-board rule.”⁴¹

He then goes on to say that heavier men should not wear cummerbunds as it “will make you look even heavier.” Slatkin said his reason for making these statements were due to the fact that the audience should be paying attention to the music, not to anyone standing out from the orchestra.

Ironically, Slatkin is a heavier man yet does not discriminate against himself, only against other heavy musicians. His comments regarding women in trousers are silly and impractical. For some instruments such as clarinets and cellos, trousers are desired or necessary for ideal playing posture. Although some female cello or clarinet players play in skirts or dresses, many others prefer and perform in pants. Either way, the audience will not see the rear ends of these women and will focus on the music whether or not the musicians look “good.” His remarks on male cummerbunds fall along the same line of ridiculousness. Audience members will not care if a man in the orchestra looks overweight or not. Audience members come for the music, not a fashion show.

⁴¹ RW Deutsch, "Slatkin Says Overweight Musicians Should Cover Up," MTV News, August 23, 2000.

Slatkin's career position makes his statements even more regrettable. At the time of this interview, he was head conductor of the National Symphony in Washington D.C. and the chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Since then, he has conducted in every major orchestra in the United States, produced over 100 recordings, received the National Medal of Arts, and currently conducts the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.⁴² Clearly, he is a highly esteemed conductor and comments such as these have major repercussions in the conducting world. He holds so much influence that if he did discriminate against a musician due to their weight, it may be extremely difficult for that musician to find an orchestral position in a symphony unaffected by his opinions.

Slatkin's comments and the earlier comments on overweight female opera singers illustrate an unconscious bias against heavier people that many are unwilling to admit. In a study where people had their weight manipulated using theatrical prostheses to appear heavier or skinnier, those evaluating the weight-manipulated people for a job rated the heavier-looking people more negatively than the same people who were then altered to appear of a normal weight. The negative perceptions were even stronger for the heavier-looking female participants than for the heavier-looking male participants.⁴³ These findings are considered especially depressing because although there is more freedom to manipulate someone's weight than there is to manipulate skin color or gender, a person's weight is generally determined by genetics or side effects of disease or medication more so than exercise and diet.

⁴² "Biography - Leonard Slatkin," Leonard Slatkin, , accessed July 1, 2016.

⁴³ Regina Pingitore et al. "Bias Against Overweight Job Applicants in a Simulated Employment Interview." *Journal Of Applied Psychology* 79, no. 6: 909-917.

The inability to truly manipulate weight was recently shown in a study following contestants of the TV show *The Biggest Loser* where extremely heavy people learned from fitness trainers and nutritionists how to exercise and eat healthy. While these people initially lost a large amount of weight, most gained it back quickly after leaving the show even when following the recommendations of the instructors. Examinations revealed that their genetics and metabolism played a role as their metabolisms were slower than expected for someone their age.⁴⁴ This suggests that even when a person recognizes the health risks of being obese and attempts to manipulate weight through exercise and diet, in some cases it is impossible to keep the extra weight off.

Studies such as these show that discrimination against weight, although not as strong or noticeable as discrimination against skin color or gender, exists and prevents people, especially women, from attaining their dream career. When weight can only be manipulated to a certain extent and yet conductors like Slatkin use weight as a basis for hiring, heavier women and men are discriminated against. Slatkin himself is a heavy-set man and even he discriminates against heavier musicians! His statements are even made more ludicrous by the fact that musicians and audience members are there for the music. Centuries of tradition dictate concert dress. If the audience cared so much about the appearance of an orchestra to influence audience attendance, musicians would probably not be dressing in funeral black for every performance.

⁴⁴ Erin Fothergill et al., "Persistent Metabolic Adaptation 6 Years after "The Biggest Loser" Competition," *Obesity*, May 2, 2016.

Slatkin and earlier comments on discrimination stated by critics of Tara Erraught and Deborah Voigt show that the classical music industry prohibits heavier women from achieving their career goals.

Part 2: Case Studies

The previous section established the historical framework of discrimination in conducting. With the evidence presented, it becomes clear that women face unique oppressions to their gender and are frequently dismissed or held back from achieving their career goals. They are seen as mothers, physically weak, unable to lead, and looked down upon for their attractiveness in orchestras but only hired if they are attractive in opera productions. In this next section, four current female conductors are examined. Each has a unique story that led them to break the glass ceiling, which will be looked at in their subsequent sections.

Marin Alsop

Marin Alsop is one of the most accomplished and acclaimed conductors to date and is the most famous living female conductor in the classical music industry.

Currently, she conducts and is the music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. She has been the conductor of the Colorado Symphony, the Bournemouth Symphony, and the Eugene Symphony. Alsop has guest conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, La Scala Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and the Bavarian Radio Symphony. She has also conducted the London Symphony and London Philharmonic and was the first woman to conduct BBC's Last Night at the Proms in 2013. She is the only conductor to receive the MacArthur Fellowship, the only classical musician in *Guardian's* "Top 100 Women," and has an immense library of recordings through Naxos, Decca Classics, Harmonia Mundi, and Sony Classical.⁴⁵

Her conducting career began when she won the Leopold Stokowski International Conducting Competition in 1989 and later that year was the first woman to win the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize from the Tanglewood Music Center. She became a student of Leonard Bernstein due to Tanglewood in 1989 and earned her first conducting job with the Eugene Symphony shortly after.

One of the many notable things about Alsop is that she studied with Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein is legendary in classical music for countless reasons. As a composer, he is most remembered for his Broadway compositions, including *West Side Story* and *Candide*, but has also written symphonies, a movie score, psalms with jazz

⁴⁵ "About - Marin Alsop," Marin Alsop.

rhythms, and sonatas. He was the conductor of the New York Philharmonic from 1958 to 1969, holding international tours with the orchestra but also guest conducting around the world. One of the most famous tours found Bernstein directing Ludwig van Beethoven's ninth symphony in both East and West Berlin to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁶ With a large and diverse résumé such as his, any student would receive an invaluable education, including Alsop.

Bernstein was in fact well regarded as an educator to both classical and non-classical audiences. In addition to writing print lectures, he used television in a way no conductor ever had before. Bernstein's televised series titled *Omnibus* consisted of seven lectures that examined various subjects within the sciences, arts, and humanities. Later, with the New York Philharmonic, Bernstein led a TV program for children titled *Young People's Concerts* where every episode would examine a question about classical music and devote a concert to finding the answer.⁴⁷ Marin Alsop clearly received a well-rounded and priceless education from her main mentor and as he was regarded so highly both in the United States and abroad, may have received network connections and referrals not given to those outside of his influence.

Being a Bernstein student may have helped Alsop get a leg-up in areas other women have struggled. Her résumé at the appointment of the Eugene Symphony could suggest this. At the time of her hire, she was founder, artistic director and conductor of Concordia Orchestra and assistant conductor of the Richmond Symphony in Virginia. Through Bernstein's connections, she conducted Richard Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel"

⁴⁶ S.v. "Leonard Bernstein," April 04, 2016.

⁴⁷ "Leonard Bernstein: The Educator," Bernstein: The Best of All Possible Worlds, December 13, 2008.

at the Schleswig Holstein Festival in Germany. Alsop had also at this time conducted the New York Ballet City Orchestra where her father is concertmaster.⁴⁸ Alsop received conducting opportunities from Bernstein and her father that other women were denied, excluded from, or did not otherwise have access to. These guest conducting opportunities and festivals led to her being able to start the Concordia Orchestra, gaining an appointment at the Richmond Symphony, and later the Eugene Symphony.

After her tenure ended with the Eugene Symphony, Alsop then went on to more prominent orchestras such as the Colorado Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra where she works today. Although it is clear that Alsop is an incredible conductor in her own right, “having [Bernstein] share his amazing knowledge with me was an invaluable gift.”⁴⁹ His referrals to various festivals may have benefited her at the start of her career.

Job referrals in general have been shown to desegregate the workplace. One study that made this clear was a survey conducted in 2008 in the nursing field, traditionally regarded as a female-dominated occupation. Nurses are more likely to be hired if they are female but when male nurses are informally referred to employers in this field, they become more likely to be hired. Hospitals that conduct employee referrals as part of their hiring process have more male nurses than hospitals that do not use employee referrals.⁵⁰ This may have to do with employees being able to express personality characteristics of their referrals to hiring employers that are otherwise left

⁴⁸ Paul Denison, "Symphony Signs a New Conductor," *The Register-Guard* (Eugene), June 29, 1989.

⁴⁹ Marin Alsop, conductor of Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, in discussion with the author of this thesis, May 24, 2016.

⁵⁰ Julie A. Kmec, "The Process of Sex Segregation in a Gender-Typed Field: The Case of Male Nurses," *Sociological Perspectives* 51, no. 2 (2008): doi:10.1525/sop.2008.51.2.259.

off formal applications. Bernstein's referral of Alsop's skill, personality, and talent allowed her to join circles previously closed to women.

The fact that Alsop is a woman may have also contributed to some of her first successes. Prior to Alsop, women in the conducting field were practically nonexistent. Her gender may have stood out in a sea of men as much as her skill at the start of her career. In same-sex professions such as conducting, gender seems to be just as important as occupational competencies. Women in male-dominated career fields and men in female-dominated career fields report feeling more like an outsider than the gender dominating the field.⁵¹ This is evident in any unusual characteristic in a dominated field, whether race, gender, sexuality, or social class, but gender is quite noticeable in conducting. For example, the Eugene Symphony, Alsop's first tenured conducting position, also hired notable conductors of color such as Miguel Harth-Bedoya, now conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and Giancarlo Guerrero, now conductor of the Nashville Symphony, yet Alsop is better remembered because she differs from the other conductors in gender. Alsop clearly proved her skill to become permanently hired in the orchestras she worked with but she may have been remembered in a hiring committee more easily than a man, leading to an audition and later hire.

However, the salience of gender has its downfalls. Alsop has experienced her share of discrimination as a budding conductor, such as being told she was unable to

⁵¹ Anne Statham Macke, "Token Men and Women: A Note On the Salience of Sex and Occupation Among Professionals and Semiprofessionals," *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 8, no. 1 (February 1981): doi:10.1177/073088848100800102.

conduct composers such as Anton Bruckner.⁵² She was also nearly eliminated from the audition process of the Eugene Symphony due to her age and gender.⁵³ Situations such as these were prevalent in her time undoubtedly due to being the only woman in a sea of men, but since Alsop's rise and establishment in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and other women winning conducting auditions, experiences such as these have decreased. Laura Jackson discusses this in her section of this thesis.

Once Alsop was hired, she became a role model and mentor to aspiring women conductors. Alsop has been interviewed countless times to discuss discrimination in orchestras, including an interview for this thesis. She has also heralded the Taki Concordia Fellowship, a fellowship designed specifically for aspiring female conductors to conduct and work with arts management.⁵⁴ Creating opportunities for women help equal the playing field. Prior to Alsop breaking the glass ceiling, the vast majority, if not all, conducting and education opportunities were exclusively available to men. Yet work still needs to be done. Alsop herself stated that many men do not consider sexual discrimination to be a problem.⁵⁵ Creating a fellowship to help women in music is only one solution. Other solutions are discussed at the conclusion of this thesis.

⁵² Tim Smith, "Conductor Knows No Gender Boundaries," *Sun Sentinel* (Miami), March 20, 1994.

⁵³ Paul Denison, "A Standout Conductor," *The Register-Guard* (Eugene), November 09, 1990.

⁵⁴ "About the Fellowship," Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship.

⁵⁵ Marin Alsop, conductor of Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, in discussion with the author of this thesis, May 24, 2016.

Alondra de la Parra

Where Marin Alsop breaks gender barriers by being the first woman, Alondra de la Parra has broken race barriers by being a conducting woman of color. Her current position is with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, one of Australia's three largest orchestras, and her discography and experience is immense. Parra was born in New York City but moved to Mexico City at the age of two. She studied conducting, piano performance, and composition at the Centro de Investigación y Estudios Musicales and the Manhattan School of Music. Her teachers included Marin Alsop, Kenneth Kiesler, Jeffrey Cohen, Natasha Tarásova, and György Sándor. Parra has guest conducted countless orchestras in Europe, the United States, Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Uruguay, and Asia. She was the first Mexican woman to conduct in New York City and founded the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, an orchestra dedicated to performing historic Latin American music.⁵⁶ Clearly, Parra is in a league of her own, between creating an orchestra, guest conducting in numerous countries, and being an official cultural ambassador of Mexico.

Parra is a conductor who has accomplished countless feats in the classical music world and one of the few conductors who are nonwhite. There are classical conductors of color such as Jose-Luis Novo, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Giancarlo Guerrero, Michael Morgan, and Sonia Maria de Leon de Vega and conductors who are also educators such as Marlon Daniel, leader of the Colour of Music Festival, and Rodney Dorsey, director of bands here at the University of Oregon. Although there are more conductors of color today than have been in the past in the United States, there are more male than female

⁵⁶ "Alondra De La Parra: Bio," Alondra De La Parra.

conductors of color. Women conductors of color face unique discrimination not only due to their gender, but also because of their race.

Conductor and musician role models for people of color are scant in professional orchestras. White conductors greatly outnumber those of color and remain the norm in classical music. Among the general population in the United States, non-Hispanic whites make up only 64% of the population yet the vast majority of United States conductors are white and of European heritage.⁵⁷ Musicians of color make up only 4.2% of orchestras.⁵⁸ Why do white conductors and musicians greatly outnumber those of color?

The answer to this issue comes in multiple layers. First, examine the makeup of orchestras. The Memphis Symphony has 57 players and three of those are identified as black or mixed race.⁵⁹ The city of Memphis, however, is 63% black.⁶⁰ Baltimore is 64% black as noted on their last census.⁶¹ Yet their symphony has only one black musician.⁶² Detroit has more black people than any other city in America, with 83% registering as black on the 2015 census.⁶³ Yet in the city's symphony of 78 musicians, only four are black.⁶⁴ All these cities described have a majority black population yet their orchestras are overwhelmingly white.

⁵⁷ "Quick Facts: United States." *United States Census Bureau*, 2015.

⁵⁸ Vivien Schweitzer, "'Diversity Is Good Business' - My Report on Efforts to Promote Diversity in Classical Music - Vivien Schweitzer, Culture Journalist, Researcher, Pianist," Vivien Schweitzer: Blog, February 10, 2015.

⁵⁹ "Meet the Musicians," Memphis Symphony Orchestra.

⁶⁰ "Quick Facts: Memphis City, Tennessee." *United States Census Bureau*, 2010.

⁶¹ "Quick Facts: Baltimore City, Maryland." *United States Census Bureau*, 2010.

⁶² "Musicians," Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

⁶³ "Quick Facts: Detroit City, Michigan." *United States Census Bureau*, 2010.

⁶⁴ "Meet the Musicians," Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The orchestras in these cities are aware of this disparity. As far back as 1988 the Michigan Arts Council threatened to withhold funding from the Detroit Symphony unless an affirmative action program was implemented.⁶⁵ In July 2016 the League of American Orchestras titled their yearly conference “The Richness of Difference” to address this racial divide in classical music and seek solutions. Many orchestras today are seeking to engage a more racially diverse audience and orchestral makeup, yet musicians, conductors, and audience members of classical music are still almost exclusively white and of European heritage.

Why then, even with recent encouragement from orchestras and arts programs, are people of color absent from classical concerts? Many nonwhite people do not consider it a part of their culture. They do not listen to classical music, discouraging people in their communities to take up an instrument and learn the art. Kelly Hall-Tompkins, a black violin soloist, remarked that even “well-meaning people” have told her to “switch over to play our music.”⁶⁶ People of her race view this classically-trained violinist as taking part in someone’s else culture. Because of the view that people of color are outsiders looking in when it comes to classical music, they do not go to classical music concerts. When white people play music written by white people, only white people feel comfortable sitting in the audience. People of color who might otherwise take up an instrument do not because they never hear classical music to begin with or they cannot picture themselves on the stage.

⁶⁵ *Detroit Symphony Orchestra Case Study*, December 2014.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Law and Kelly Hall-Tompkins, “African-American Musicians, More Than Just Jazz,” interview by Celeste Headlee, WNYC, August 14, 2013.

Even when there is the will to learn an instrument, many people of color do not have the accessibility white people do. In 2011, reports indicate that 26% of black people, 24% of American Indians, 16% of Native Hawaiians, and 23% of Hispanics lived below the poverty line. Only 12% of white people lived below the poverty line.⁶⁷ Poverty makes the ability to afford an instrument and having time to practice infinitely difficult. Buying the instrument itself is a huge investment. For example, a professional violin can cost between \$788 to over \$1,000. Even a student model can cost around \$200.⁶⁸ For a family at or below the poverty line, the amount of money to afford this equipment is unreasonable. This does not cover the cost of a bow, the occasional repair, or strings that have to be replaced over time. Even renting through a school program or music store contains a fee.

As there are more people of color under the poverty line than white people, it is more likely that those unable to afford an instrument will be people of color. Even when an instrument can be bought or rented, countless hours must be spent practicing that would otherwise be spent earning cash at a typical job. Someone on the poverty line will be more likely to be focused on what makes money immediately over someone who is more affluent. Once again, when there are more people of color under the poverty line than white people, people of color are disadvantaged financially and have to make ends meet which usually means not learning an instrument and ultimately not getting into classical music.

⁶⁷ Suzanne Macartney, Alemayehu Bishaw, and Kayla Fontenot, "Poverty Rates for Selected Detailed Race and Hispanic Groups by State and Place: 2007–2011," *United States Census Bureau*, February 2013.

⁶⁸ "Fine European Handmade Violins, Violin Accessories, and Other Stringed Instruments."

There are, however, exceptions to this theory. When discussing the lack of people of color in orchestras and classical music audiences, many fail to recognize that Asian people, considered a minority in the United States, perform in American orchestras and attend concerts. Unlike black people, Latinos, and those from other non-Asian cultures, Asian people accept classical music as a part of their culture. This is due in part to European missionaries that traveled to China in the early part of the 19th century to spread Christian faith.⁶⁹ These missionaries brought pianos with them to better teach the Chinese about Christianity.

Later in 1879, a German doctor founded a symphonic band in Shanghai which integrated Western classical music into the mainstream of Chinese culture. In China, Western classical music became identified with scientific advancement and innovation.⁷⁰ Unlike Latinos and blacks, Chinese people were formally taught Western classical music. White settlers and missionaries in Latin America did not seek to introduce Latin American people to classical music nor did they create bands, orchestras, or conservatories to showcase Western classical music. Black people in America were actively denied any sort of classical music employment, leading them to develop jazz, their own form of classical music, with Western instruments. Today, classical training is regarded as a skill for the elite in Chinese culture, as the hours of practice signify self-cultivation and self-discipline.⁷¹ Western classical music is

⁶⁹ Hao Huang, "Why Chinese People Play Western Classical Music: Transcultural Roots of Music Philosophy," *International Journal of Music Education* 30, no. 2 (2011): doi:10.1177/0255761411420955. Page 4.

⁷⁰ Huang, 4.

⁷¹ Huang, 11.

accepted as part of Chinese culture and it is hardly recognized in Latino and black cultures.

These two reasons – lack of money and inability to identify with classical music culture – deter people of color away from classical music. When all conductors begin as orchestral musicians and so few people of color pursue classical music, it's not surprising there are so few female conductors of color. As Western classical music unconsciously alienates people of color, it becomes no wonder that Alondra de la Parra is nearly alone at the top as a Mexican-American women conductor. Attempting to fix this issue by including more diversity and making people of color feel as though classical music can be their music is a complex issue to be discussed at the conclusion.

Diane Wittry

Diane Wittry is largely known as a guest conductor, performing in the United States and internationally. Her US engagements include the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, New Jersey Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Houston Symphony, and others with reporters in multiple newspapers calling her both “outstanding” and passionate.”⁷² She has conducted in Bosnia, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Italy, Canada, and Japan. Wittry has also led a number of symphonies as music director, including the Norwalk Symphony, Symphony of Southeast Texas, and Greater Miami Youth Symphony.⁷³ Currently, she is the music director of the Allentown Symphony in Pennsylvania. Under her tenure as director, she has greatly expanded the educational component of the symphony by increasing youth and family concerts and creating a symphony for amateur musicians, a national string competition, and a conducting fellowship.⁷⁴ As though that was not enough, Wittry is also a composer, premiering her first work *Mist* in 2008 with the Allentown Symphony. All of her other compositions have received premieres and multiple performances.

Wittry follows in a legacy of women composers. Two of the most notable women composers in the past few centuries include Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel and Clara Schumann. Mendelssohn-Hensel largely wrote art songs for piano and voice and according to her teacher Ludwig Berger “had achieved a level of musical knowledge few other artists who have dedicated their lives to music could claim.” However,

⁷² “Reviews.” Diane Wittry, Conductor.

⁷³ “Diane Wittry: Conductor.” Diane Wittry, Conductor.

⁷⁴ “Music Director/Conductor: Diane Wittry.” Miller Symphony Hall: Home of the Allentown Symphony Orchestra.

discouraged from composing by her father, all of Fanny's works were performed at concerts in the Mendelssohn home. She did not publish any works until a year before her death in 1847, although her five lieder and a duet with piano accompaniment were published under her brother's name, Felix, earlier in her life. Today, she is considered one of the most important composers of the Romantic era.⁷⁵

Clara Schumann, also considered a prolific Romantic composer, composed mostly piano works, arranging many of her husband's pieces and performing them in concerts. She was regarded as good as a pianist as her contemporary, Franz Liszt, but practiced only when her husband, Robert, also a composer, would not be distributed. After Robert's death in 1856 she ceased composing and devoted her life to performing his works, editing them, and preparing instructive editions of them for students. After her death, she was largely forgotten as a composer until the 1970s.⁷⁶

To the musician, music historian, composer, and casual listener, Fanny and Clara are well-regarded composers. However, society forced them to become good wives and mothers instead of pursuing careers and increasing the classical repertoire. Fanny's father taught her that motherhood mattered more than her compositions and Clara put her own works aside to manage those of her husband's. These women are also presented as the only two – if that – in many standard classical music encyclopedias and music history courses.

It seems almost impossible that when there are hundreds of great male composers that only two women ever composed in the history of music literature.

⁷⁵ "Fanny Hensel Biografie," Fanny Hensel Mendelssohn,

⁷⁶ Nancy B. Reich, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Schumann, Clara."

Indeed, the definitive encyclopedia of women composers written by Aaron Cohen lists over 6,196. Yet those involved in classical music usually find only Mendelssohn-Hensel, Schumann, Amy Beach, and Jennifer Higdon performed and discussed in music history. There are two reasons to explain the dearth of female composers.

One reason was the active discouragement prohibiting women to compose. As stated earlier, despite the obvious talents of Mendelssohn-Hensel, she was largely discouraged by her father to compose and was told instead to focus on becoming a mother. Amy Beach, the most famous American woman composer, was discouraged by her husband to perform and her career as a composer and musician took off only after his death.⁷⁷ Danish composer Nancy Dahlberg was denied compositional studies by her father and played piano only recreationally after marriage, although she did study with Carl Nielsen.⁷⁸ Men in the time periods these women lived frowned upon women composing. Instead, performing and teaching were encouraged as acceptable career options for women in music.

Women were encouraged to play and teach piano almost exclusively. The piano could be used to entertain guests or family and eventually be a deciding factor in marriage eligibility.⁷⁹ Composition, on the other hand, was not an attractive skill for women seeking marriage to have, as it could pave the path to the woman earning her own money and not even needing a husband. Women were then instructed up until the 20th century to perform music, not to write it.

⁷⁷ Adrienne Fried Block, *Grove Music Online*, ed. Douglas Bomberger, s.v. "Beach, Amy Marcy."

⁷⁸ "Nancy Dalberg," Decapo Records: Classical and New Music from the Danish National Label.

⁷⁹ "In Search of Women in American Song: A Neglected Musical Heritage," The Parlour Songs Academy: Lessons in America's Popular Music History.

The second major reason so few women exist in the repertoire lies with men of influence in music history. When male historians write music history, they decide who is important and who can be forgotten. As a result, they erase those who do not look like them and countless women are then deleted from history. This is especially evident in jazz history.

When a casual listener becomes interested in jazz, they listen to great musicians of the genre such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Buddy Rich, and Chet Baker. Yet not a single woman is presented in jazz historical archives save for Maria Schneider who did not rise to prominence until the 1990s. This leads audience members, performers, historians, and jazz outsiders to believe that women simply do not play jazz.

Yet women existed. Melba Liston was heralded for her jazz trombone skills and work as an arranger.⁸⁰ Valaida Snow was dubbed “Queen of the Trumpet” and compared to Louis Armstrong. Mary Lou Williams had an early influence on later bebop giants.⁸¹ The International Sweethearts of Rhythm was an all-women interracial jazz big band with sold out shows in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and Atlantic City.⁸² However, these women, bands, and arrangements have all been forgotten. The only women remembered in jazz today are vocalists such as Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald. Female singers were more accepted in the jazz realm than were female

⁸⁰ Burrill Crohn, prod., "Women in Jazz," 1981, August 26, 2011.

⁸¹ Margaret Howze, "Women in Jazz," NPR.

⁸² Winston Benjamin, "International Sweethearts of Rhythm Jazz Band," BlackPast.org: Remembered and Reclaimed.

Megan Mayhew Bergman, "The International Sweethearts of Rhythm," Oxford American: A Magazine of the South, November 20, 2011.

instrumentalists. Instrumentalists such as Billy Tipton lived their professional life as a man due to the fact that a woman playing with the same skill on an instrument in the jazz world would be ostracized or treated as a novelty.⁸³ Women composers faced similar challenges as women jazz instrumentalists.

Due to the sexism in their respective times, women composers usually promoted male composer's works instead of their own. As stated earlier, after Robert Schumann's death Clara Schumann created and published instructive editions of his work rather than publish her own works. Similarly in jazz, when the accomplished pianist Lil Hardin married Louis Armstrong, she quit her performance career to focus on supporting his career and today is largely credited with establishing him as a solo artist.⁸⁴ In these cases, women of the time realized that furthering the careers of their men could prove more fruitful than trying to break societal norms to make their own.

Today, women composers can thankfully and rightfully take credit for their own work. Diane Wittry can compose, conduct, and be a music director, and her contemporaries such as Jennifer Higdon can have her works such as *blue cathedral* performed over 300 times a year.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the men of history have left a massive dearth of female-produced works. Having at most four women composers in the repertoire while innumerable white men have their works performed year after year is clearly problematic. Great female works have been lost in time or purposely scratched from historical records. Musicians, audience members, and music directors should aim

⁸³ "'Dad' to Adopted Sons: Jazz Player Billy Tipton Kept Her Secret to the End," Los Angeles Times, February 01, 1989.

⁸⁴ Carrie Borzillo et al., "Women in Jazz: Music on Their Terms--As Gender Bias Fades, New Artists Emerge," *Billboard*, June 29, 1996.

⁸⁵ "About Jennifer Higdon," Jennifer Higdon, <http://jenniferhigdon.com/biography.html>.

to heal this chasm. Composition, like conducting and jazz, should not be limited to one gender.

Laura Jackson

Laura Jackson has followed in the footsteps of the great male and female conductors to become one of the most accomplished conductors of today. Before her current position as conductor and music director of the Reno Philharmonic, Jackson was the assistant conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano until 2007. She has also been the conductor of the Naschua Chamber Orchestra, was the Seiji Ozawa Conducting Fellow at the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Music Center, and the music director of the Life Sciences Orchestra at the University of Michigan. Jackson received her doctoral degree from the University of Michigan and her violin and conducting degrees from Indiana University. She has conducted throughout North America, including the symphonies of Alabama, Baltimore, Berkeley, Detroit, Phoenix, and Toronto, and was the first American to lead the Algerian National Orchestra. She is now the music director and conductor of the Reno Philharmonic, where she has commissioned works by composers such as Michael Gandolfi, Sean Shepherd, and David Bugli.⁸⁶

I selected Jackson for this thesis for a more personal reason than the other conductors I have examined so far. The resumes of Marin Alsop, Alondra de la Parra, and Diane Wittry are incredible but exhaustive. As an undergraduate student attending the University of Oregon, while I naturally have high aspirations for myself I feel

⁸⁶ "Laura Jackson - Bio," Laura Jackson.

overwhelmed looking at the life stories of Alsop and Parra, both of whom were singled out as rising stars early in their career, and Wittry, who does enough work for three people combined. Jackson seemed more personable to me. I could not imagine at this point in my life studying with a conductor of the New York Philharmonic, conducting in multiple countries, or composing multiple pieces, but I can picture myself in the shoes of Laura Jackson, who began her musical studies at the same age I did, went to an excellent school, and conducted smaller-scale orchestras before becoming the conductor of the Reno Philharmonic. With the help of my mentor, Dr. Rodney Dorsey, I sought her out for an interview to get a primary account of her career and how aspiring woman conductors can achieve their dreams in the future.

In her undergraduate years and starting conductor positions, Jackson said she did not experience gender discrimination. Throughout her time at Indiana University and learning under Robert Spano, she never had a conversation about any sort of discrimination.⁸⁷ In fact, when she “snuck into one of his rehearsals and walked right up to him and said, ‘I’m the music director of the Naschua Chamber Orchestra and I was wondering if I could have a lesson with you,’ to my surprise he said, ‘Sure!’”⁸⁸ She did not back down or think she would be held back by her gender and neither did her peers or mentors. On the contrary, she was encouraged to follow her dreams.

Being a strong musician in the field helped immensely. As Alsop began as a professional violinist in New York City, Jackson began as a professional violinist in

⁸⁷ Laura Jackson, conductor of the Reno Philharmonic, in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁸⁸ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

Boston which gave her opportunities to begin her conducting career.⁸⁹ While she was a professional violinist, her mentor, Mimi Bravar, gave her opportunities to conduct children's and youth orchestras. By learning how to conduct these youth orchestras, she was able to audition and win the position of conductor of the Naschua Chamber Orchestra.

Yet this is not to say sexism was nonexistent in her time. When Jackson was applying to jobs before she won the position at Reno, she did face opposition to her gender from an unnamed orchestra.

Early on in my career, I found a job opening for a conducting position and called the executive director who basically told me I shouldn't bother. Apparently the orchestra had had a negative experience with a woman guest conductor so it appeared to be that this orchestra "doesn't do women." This was in 1994. What's weird is that the executive director was a woman, and what's weirder is that I accepted it!⁹⁰

As recent as twenty years ago woman conductors such as Jackson were dismissed from possible conducting positions due to their gender. Even when there are women in high-ranking positions such as the music director in this unnamed orchestra, the orchestra itself behaves in a discriminatory way towards a prospective conductor. The acceptance that Jackson describes in regards to this rejection shows that this discrimination, although not experienced by Jackson as a student, was common enough to be accepted when seeking a career.

As shown throughout my thesis, this mentality still exists today. As Jackson stated, throughout numerous orchestras' seasons in America "you'll find entire seasons

⁸⁹ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹⁰ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

with one, zero, maybe two women conductors.”⁹¹ Women conductors are still being considered a novelty and a male conductor is still considered the norm. Jackson herself was astonished when she auditioned for the Reno Philharmonic and she was one of three female candidates for the position. She claimed that audition was the most woman conductors auditioning for a position that she had ever seen before.⁹² Male conductors were the norm and a woman conductor was considered to be a novelty in her time, even more so than now.

However, despite the marked absence of female conductors the viewpoints within orchestras are becoming more progressive. When asked if men in the field have similar attitudes as the sexist men stated in the beginning of my thesis such as Vasily Petrenko, Jackson noted that “most people don’t think like Petrenko anymore.”⁹³ She has been in front of countless orchestras in a number of cities both in the United States and outside the country and trained with a number of conductors and musicians. To say that Petrenko’s, Yuri Termirkanov’s, Bruce Mantovani’s and other regressive views are the minority shows that women can be accepted now in leadership positions in classical music. It was only forty years ago that Sabine Meyer was denied a position as principal clarinetist in the Berlin Philharmonic.⁹⁴ Although the attitudes of the men in Meyer’s day still exist, they are fading away.

Today, Jackson notes, much of what holds women conductors back are the same as what holds male conductors back. Women can get “stuck in a victim mentality and

⁹¹ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹² Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹³ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹⁴ "Karajan and Orchestra Clash Over Clarinetist." The New York Times. January 8, 1983.

think things are due to gender, but I can't control my gender. I can only control how hard I work.”⁹⁵ When historically women have been oppressed from the world of classical music for so long it may seem every setback is due to gender oppression.

While it is true that women have to overcome more obstacles than men, Jackson reports that in some cases her gender benefited her.

When I conducted the Algerian National Orchestra – and I'm the only person from the United States to do that – to celebrate their 50 years of independence, they told me they specifically wanted a woman to conduct them for the celebration so that's how I got the gig.⁹⁶

Had Jackson not been a woman, she never would have had the experience of being the first American to conduct the Algerian National Orchestra. Although she benefitted from her gender in this case, this is a different kind of discrimination that would have prevented a man of her equal skill conducting the orchestra instead. This is obviously not bad in the light of oppression faced for centuries before but it shows that in some rare cases, the tide has turned completely and men can become the ones at a disadvantage.

Much of conducting today, according to Jackson, is neutral to both genders as it is such a hard career to be in. Getting an orchestral position is due mostly to “chemistry” and in some cases, who may have come before, as stated by Jackson.⁹⁷ Men and women conductors today have to build their careers by conducting smaller gigs and festivals before they are able to become professional conductors. As with any

⁹⁵ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹⁶ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹⁷ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

profession, orchestral hires a due to a number of qualifications, each unique to the orchestra and its community.

However, the picture is not entirely equal and Jackson states that she will run into the occasional sexist or uncooperative musician.

[Even today] I have felt when I was in a room full of men that I would get talked over or feel like I had to assert myself. Sometimes I've felt like I've had to be active in preventing that, or maybe my actions inspire this. I have encountered professionals where it seems like no matter what I do it's not good enough which had led me to wonder about sexism.⁹⁸

It seems that the reality of conducting and sexism aligns more on a grayscale than on a black and white portrait. Although Jackson states that she has experienced discrimination such as in this statement, she also states that her education was nondiscriminatory and in some cases even received some benefits.

Some benefits she discussed included the different viewpoint that being a woman in the conducting field brings. One reason Jackson was hired at the Reno Philharmonic was because the orchestra wanted a “new and fresh perspective” and as a woman, Jackson arrived with almost no history in the classical music world.⁹⁹ Women in classical music are the definition of a new perspective. They are able to present material that better speaks to them as their experience may be different from a man's. As orchestras and the genre of classical music are constantly criticized for being dull and historic, more women conductors may be hired in the future to attempt to change public opinion.

In fact, throughout Jackson's life she has experienced this change firsthand.

⁹⁸ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

⁹⁹ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

Throughout most of my career there's just been a handful of women conductors and we've all known each other. But now I hear of women conducting who I've never heard before. This is just showing that the floodgates are opening. I don't know half of the women conducting anymore.... I don't even know Susanne Mälkki and she's taking the world by storm. I've actually liked being the only woman candidate for music director. I'm a novelty and that stands out immediately, but this probably won't happen anymore.¹⁰⁰

History is changing for the better. Throughout Jackson's career the number of women conducting has grown from a small, close-knit community to a vast group. As stated in the very start of my thesis, the numbers are clearly still unequal. However, this is not to say that will last. It could very well be that by the time Jackson retires women will conduct 40% or even 50% of American orchestras. By acknowledging the oppressions women have had to face in the past and moving forward and overcoming them, these numbers can become reality. The more women conduct, the more women and men will both be accepted as the norm in orchestral leadership and the less sexist obstacles women will have to face in order to achieve their career goals.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson in discussion with the author of this thesis, July 3, 2016.

Conclusion

This thesis explained to both a classical and non-classical audience how sexism in the professional classical music industry has altered the careers of many women. Despite common thought that classical music transcends social and political barriers, it has been shown throughout this thesis that this is not the case.

As with almost any profession, men in powerful positions make breaking the glass ceiling a challenge for women and minorities. This has been made evident by reading opinions of European orchestral conductors as shown in the first half of my thesis. Vasily Petrenko, Yuri Termirkanov, and Bruno Mantovani all actively prevent women from achieving conducting career goals. When men in leadership positions such as these three say that “a cute girl on the podium means that musicians think about other things,” that “the essence of a woman is weakness,” or women are “discouraged by the very physical aspect” of boarding a plane to guest conduct, their actions follow their words and they will prevent some women from achieving their goals. They and other men are less likely to hire or refer a woman to an orchestra because they believe these inaccurate but damaging stereotypes about women. Even when a man in power does hire a woman to be in a leadership position such as when Herbert von Karajan appointed Sabine Meyer to be the principal clarinetist of the Berlin Philharmonic, sexist views at the time prevented her from attaining a permanent position.

Opera, a subset of classical music, can be discriminatory especially when it comes to weight. Critics and producers blast women such as Tara Erraught and Deborah Voigt for their size when the focus should be on their music. Voigt, for example, was told to lose weight for a CD recording. It is impossible for a listener to detect if an opera

singer is heavy from their singing alone, yet a producer denies Voigt a career opportunity because of this. On stage, critics of the Glyndebourne's production of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* disapprove of Erraught's general performance, referencing her looks as "dumpy" and a "chubby bundle of puppy fat" while her slimmer counterparts are praised for their appearance and vocal ability. Heavier men such as Luciano Pavarotti never experienced these kinds of reviews in their career yet larger women face this problem. Classical male music conductors also discriminate against weight, as Leonard Slatkin noted that heavier women should not wear trousers when they perform as "it does not look too good." Weight discrimination is just as much of a problem as general sexism. Heavier women face rejection due to their gender, their weight, and whether they look subjectively attractive based on physical traits they cannot easily change.

Gender discrimination can then extend to a non-classical audience, as Anthony Tommasini, critic for the New York Times, claimed in his evaluation of Marin Alsop. According to him, her main reason for breaking the glass ceiling was due to the fact that she is a lesbian and that men may be more comfortable to play under someone who cannot be attracted to them. Reducing Alsop to her sexuality diminishes not only her skill but also the skill of male orchestral musicians in assuming that, as Petrenko believes, all that is needed to ruin the focus and dedication of an orchestra is to simply place a pretty face on the podium. Men in Alsop's orchestras do not care if she is a lesbian or heterosexual. They care that she conducts well. However, when a non-classical audience believes and writes these statements, they influence how the public thinks about classical music, leading the public to believe that orchestral musicians have

a lack of focus or that a heterosexual woman should not or cannot pursue a career in classical music.

This thesis does not end there. Rather, a closer examination of women who broke the glass ceiling paints a realistic picture of what occurs inside the industry. Clearly even within these examinations work still needs to be done to achieve equality. This is shown in the field of composition as examined by looking at Diane Wittry and the legacy she follows. Women such as Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel and Amy Beach were actively discouraged from writing pieces and the vast majority, even if successful during life, were later forgotten after they passed away. This is comparable to jazz, where women such as Lil Hardin, like Clara Schumann, put her career on hold to benefit her husband's. Other women such as Mary Lou Williams and Valaida Snow were lost in time after they died.

Alondra de la Parra's breakthrough of the glass ceiling illustrates another example of discrimination: race. She is one of the few women of color on the podium. People of color, as noted earlier, are unbelievably rare in classical music. Many feel as though classical music is not part of their culture because they do not see people who look like them, whether performing, conducting, or composing a piece. Indeed, the vast majority of classical music is saturated with white people. When people of color, many who are low-income, do not see their people on the stage and are unable to have the time and money it takes to become proficient on an instrument, many do not even consider trying to learn classical music, much less get to a professional level to play in an orchestra. This erases diversity within classical music.

Despite the unrelenting and discouraging dirge women have to face in the classical music field, the tide is turning. Consider the great Marin Alsop, the woman who broke the glass ceiling as mentioned in an earlier section of my thesis. With the guidance of her mentor, Leonard Bernstein, she received referrals to conduct festivals and later was able to secure conducting and music director positions in a number of orchestras before landing where she is today at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Today, women aspiring to be conductors can watch videos of her conducting the BBC Proms, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and other orchestras and envision themselves in her shoes.

Look also to Laura Jackson, the current conductor of the Reno Philharmonic. As stated in her section, she did experience some discrimination in the early part of her career, but was never discouraged by her mentors. She chose not to focus on orchestras that did not “do women” but rather concentrated her energy on jobs she could attain, such as conducting youth orchestras and the Life Sciences Orchestra to eventually get to the position she is at today. As she stated in her interview, “Most people don’t think like Petrenko anymore and I’ve been in front of many, many orchestras in the United States and outside of it. If you do quality work, treat others with respect, are well-prepared, genuinely earnest, focus on the work and not yourself, that is the secret to success.” Although there are plenty of men who have held women back for centuries, there are countless men and women today who are supportive of others, regardless of gender. Historical and entrenched sexism have long denied women their dreams and aspects of this are still around today. However, as more people are becoming aware of this issue

and equality moves forward in other fields, the tide is turning and more women are able and encouraged to become conductors than ever before.

Many people in leadership roles in classical music have recognized this lack of equality and are seeking to balance the scales by creating festivals and orchestras exclusively for women and people of color, two groups that have been disadvantaged within classical music, to give them opportunities that have otherwise been historically denied. Women aspiring to be conductors can apply for Marin Alsop's Taki Concordia Fellowship, where they receive lessons from Alsop, lead different orchestras, and gain experience working with symphony boards, marketing and fundraising departments.¹⁰¹ Through Alsop's connections and lessons learned in Concordia, aspiring women conductors acquire invaluable skills to take them to a professional orchestra.

The Dallas Opera also has a conducting initiative for women with the Linda and Mitch Hart Institute of Women Conductors. This program includes hands-on conducting with the Dallas Opera Orchestra, master classes with Alsop, Dallas Symphony principal guest conductor Nicole Paiement, and conductors Carlo Montanaro and Alice Farnham, in addition to sessions with CEOs and networking opportunities.¹⁰² This institute gives women a leg-up in the conducting world, helping to erase discrimination against women and balance the genders of conductors.

In England, the program, Women Conductors at Morley, host workshops beginning women conductors can take part in throughout the year. Although participation is limited to twelve students, anyone can observe and learn from the

¹⁰¹ "About the Fellowship," Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship.

¹⁰² "Women's Conducting Institute," The Dallas Opera.

sessions for a small fee.¹⁰³ This is just the tip of the iceberg to help erase gender disparity. Many more festivals and workshops exist to support women conductors.

In addition, people of color, another underrepresented minority in classical music, have a number of exclusive opportunities at their fingertips. One such opportunity is the Sphinx Organization which aims to eliminate racial discrimination for black and Latino musicians through performance opportunities. These include a solo competition, summer festival, orchestra, and multiple quartets. Sphinx also educates children of color with a violin program for youngsters and music education tools for teachers.¹⁰⁴ To eliminate possible financial barriers low-income people of color may face, Sphinx has multiple grant and scholarship programs, including an instrument fund to give low-income students the equipment they need to succeed professionally.¹⁰⁵ Resources such as these help eliminate any sort of barrier preventing black and Latino men and women from achieving their career goals.

The Colour of Music Festival, held each October in Charleston, South Carolina, has similar goals as Sphinx with a narrower focus on black composers and performers. In this festival, black musicians play music solely by black composers to showcase music written by nonwhite men and women. The Colour of Music Festival also has a chamber series as well as an orchestra.¹⁰⁶ Festivals such as the Colour of Music help give black people a space in classical music and show nonwhite people that classical music can be a part of their culture.

¹⁰³ "Women Conductors at Morley," Morley College.

¹⁰⁴ "About the Sphinx Organization," Sphinx Organization.

¹⁰⁵ "Music Assistance Fund," Sphinx Organization.

¹⁰⁶ "About the Festival," Colour of Music.

The Chicago Sinfonietta Orchestra hires solely musicians and conductors of diverse backgrounds to help people of color feel as though they are not alone in a sea of white musicians. This orchestra frequently records music by diverse composers otherwise unperformed and programs music for their season using inspiration from international instruments and genres such as the sitar and Indian Ghazal music.¹⁰⁷ They also have a number of fellowships for people of color, whether for orchestral musicians, chamber musicians, conducting fellowships, or administrative internships.¹⁰⁸ These fellowships, season programs, and orchestras give a voice to an underrepresented minority in classical music and aims to eliminate discrimination by providing a helping hand to those most likely to be disadvantaged.

Even with all these fellowships and unique musical opportunities available for people of color and women conductors, it is obvious that discrimination still exists and while these fellowships combat it, it cannot fully go away until all those in power realize their biases and aim to make the classical music field an equal space for everyone. For men reading this thesis, remember these discriminations women face in the classical world and recognize your own biases. As for women, do not walk away from this thesis discouraged or assume to be discriminated against as an aspiring woman conductor. Rather, as a woman, recognize what you are up against and work even harder to achieve the leadership position you know you deserve. Every gender should help the other in order to make an equal and balanced workplace.

¹⁰⁷ "About Us - Chicago Sinfonietta," Chicago Sinfonietta.

¹⁰⁸ "Project Inclusion - Chicago Sinfonietta," Chicago Sinfonietta.

Lastly, recall that although gender biases have been present since the dawn of time, the tides are shifting. In the year 2015 alone, Migra Gražinytė-Tyla became the associate conductor for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and later the music director and chief conductor of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Elim Chan became the first woman to win the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition, Rei Hotoda was the first women appointed associate conductor of the Utah Symphony Orchestra, JoAnn Falletta renewed her contract with the Buffalo Philharmonic, Jessica Gethin won the Brian Stacey Emerging Conductor Award, and Negin Khpolwak became Afghanistan's first woman conductor.¹⁰⁹ Although in 2016, woman conductors in the United States number only 20.5%, the number is growing faster than one can imagine. By the time today's woman conductors retire, I predict that this number will reach 50% and this thesis will be rendered historical. By combating historical discrimination and recognizing biases, men and women can achieve equality in the classical music world.

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Baer, "Moving Forward: Opportunities for Women Conductors," *Women's Philharmonic*.

Appendix

Interview with Marin Alsop

For this thesis, I arranged an email interview with Marin Alsop. My questions and her answers follow.

1. Do you feel you would be in the same position – head conductor of a top-tier orchestra – had Bernstein not mentored you? Do you think people took you more seriously at the start of your career because you were one of his students?

“I think mentors are CRITICAL in life in general, but especially for young conductors since conducting is such an abstract and complex role and requires so much knowledge and so many varied skills! Bernstein was my hero from the time I was very young, so studying with him was a dream come true. For me, it was always about the music, not about career, so it's hard for me to know how to respond to your question. Having his support meant the world to me. I admired him, revered him and loved him. Having him share his amazing knowledge with me was an invaluable gift.”

2. You have said in interviews you were told you couldn't conduct "heavier" composers like Bruckner because you are a woman. Has this influenced programming your concerts at all? For example, did being told you couldn't conduct Bruckner influence you to put more of his music in your concerts?

“I have never been drawn to Bruckner but I conduct a LOT of Mahler, a composer that many men consider too "heavy" for women - how silly is that?? I was never affected by those silly comments - made me think how ignorant the people came across!”

3. Do you still get told you cannot do certain things because you're a woman even after accomplishing all that you have done?

“If I do, I ignore it!”

4. Do you ever feel pressured to do or say certain things because you are one of the few women in such a visible position?

“I feel a responsibility to speak out on behalf of women and create as many opportunities for young women conductors as possible. That's why I started the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship in 2002.”

5. Do you think men, American or European or otherwise, notice the lack of women in the field? Do they seem willing to change it for the better?

“I don't think a lot of men consider it a problem, to be honest. Although several male colleagues have supported the winners of the Taki Fellowship and have joined me in mentoring talented women conductors, which has been GREAT!”

6. In my experience, I have found that women seem to need to be twice as competent as the men in the room in order to even have a voice in the conversation. Do you agree?

“Since women have so many fewer opportunities, they have less room for error - that's what I think. And failure is a critical step towards success, so that is often a problem.”

7. How do you think men and women can adapt to create a better balance and mutual respect?

“This is a much larger societal question but until women are less objectified it will continue to be a problem.”

Interview with Laura Jackson

For this thesis, I arranged a phone interview with Laura Jackson. My questions and her answers follow.

1. Unlike Marin Alsop who studied under Leonard Bernstein, you studied with someone who was not a household name. How did you break the glass ceiling without the immediate recognition that came from a famous name?

“In a sense, it was helpful in some regards but she doesn’t see it that way and I don’t either. It probably did help. I was a professional violinist in Boston and she was a professional violinist in New York City. I was respected as a player and teacher and that got me opportunities. Mimi Bravar was my main mentor. She gave me opportunities to conduct kids and youth orchestras. That was how I got the audition to conduct the Nashua Chamber Orchestra. The youth and amateur orchestras needed someone to conduct them and that was how I got them.”

2. How did you feel first getting these opportunities?

“I was totally excited to do it! I took a couple conducting classes at Indiana – I never experienced sexism there. When I won the position at Nashua it was a little terrifying but a great honor. I took lessons with traveling conductors. As a guest conductor, the experience is a little different. The musicians are sizing you up as soon as you walk up and in the first minute of rehearsal. This is not unique to women. Some people come up through the ranks too quickly and get surprised by this but my learning was more gradual.”

3. Did you receive encouragement when you first began your conducting studies?

Conversely, were you ever told you could not conduct because you are a woman? If you were, how did you combat that negativity?

“I never had that experience – my biggest hero was Robert Spano and I snuck into one of his rehearsals and walked right to him and said, “I’m the music director of the Nashua Chamber Orchestra and I was

wondering if I could have a lesson with you” and to my surprise he said, “Sure!” He seemed totally blind to any kind of gender thing and it started a twenty-year mentorship. He’s a phenomenal conductor and we never had a conversation about it. With the support of someone as famous as him, I never felt as though there was something I couldn’t attain.”

“Now, what about today? I have felt when I was in a room full of men that I would get talked over or feel like I had to assert myself. Sometimes I’ve felt like I’ve had to be active in preventing that, or maybe my actions inspire this. I have encountered professionals where it seems like no matter what I do it’s not good enough which had led me to wonder about sexism, but at the end of the day you have to say, “So it is! So be it!” Don’t seek approval but work around this sort of thing. It’s not a matter of being the cream of the crop, but focusing on the task at hand.”

4. In a video interview on YouTube, you are shown conducting Jennifer Higdon’s *blue cathedral*. Do you try to commission or perform works by female composers intentionally to garner more visibility for women in music in addition to the beauty of the piece?

“No I don’t. While I’ve been conductor of the Reno Philharmonic I’ve commissioned two pieces, both by white males. I am considering a woman composer for a future commission and I’ve championed some pieces, but overall I look at the greats and pick. I look for racial and political charged minority, like working with Muslim composers. For example, there are much fewer African American composers. But generally I try to bring focus away from gender, not to it. You can get stuck in a victim mentality and think things are due to gender, but I can’t control my gender. I can only control how hard I work. Failing actually inspires me to work harder. I just have to make sure I’m not treated badly.”

5. Do you ever feel pressured to do or say certain things because you are one of the few women in such a visible position?

“No, unless it’s for something like this – I’m still doing interviews like this one and asked about gender. Every woman wishes she wouldn’t have to do this and just conduct. I’ve lost many auditions and won some, and it’s not due to gender. If I were a man, it might be possible I would

be farther along in a higher ranked position or not. In general, for men and women, there is nothing fair about professional conducting orchestras.”

6. Do you think men notice the lack of women in the field? Do they seem willing to change it for the better?

“Most people don’t think like Petrenko anymore and I’ve been in front of many, many orchestras in the United States and outside of it. If you do quality work, treat others with respect, are well-prepared, genuinely earnest, and focus on the work and not yourself, that is the secret to success. In some orchestras I have felt like an iguana or novelty and the musicians stop warming up as soon as I walk up to the podium. If you look at orchestras’ seasons for the next year you’ll find entire seasons with one, zero, maybe two women conductors. The whole season! Everyone is aware this is an issue and everyone has different opinions as to why – maybe it’s sexism, maybe it’s history catching up – who knows. Time will tell.”

7. Have players in your orchestras ever been uncooperative because they thought a woman should not be in charge? If they were, how did you earn their respect and change their views?

“I have had people of various levels not be happy I was there. Male or female, I can’t distinguish if it’s specific to my gender or not. It’s often true for musicians to be mean to conductors. Here’s an example of clear sexism – Early on in my career, I found a job opening for a conducting position and called the executive director who basically told me I shouldn’t bother. Apparently the orchestra had had a negative experience with a woman guest conductor so it appeared to be that this orchestra “doesn’t do women.” This was in 1994. What’s weird is that the executive director was a woman, and what’s weirder is that I accepted it! Orchestras acting out is a common thing for men and women. What I’ve learned to do is – and what I’ve learned from great male conductors as well – is to ignore it. That works quite well. When a musician stands up and unleashes a tirade as I’ve had happen is just to let the tirade happen, explain my thinking, or calmly shut them down, but never to escalate or argue with them.”

8. In my experience, I have found that women need to be twice as competent as the men in the room in order to even have a voice in the conversation. Do you agree? How do you think men and women can adapt to create a better balance and mutual respect?

“Yes and no. That would assume I’m super competent and I’m not! Getting a position is a whole constellation of factors – a lot of it is chemistry. In Atlanta, I was the assistant conductor for three years. The only woman to conduct that orchestra before me was Alsop, so it was highly unusual for a woman to conduct them. I was probably not the best who auditioned there – it probably had to do with who conducted beforehand and I was pretty opposite so that helped. They wanted someone with a new and fresh perspective. Being a woman automatically gives you that new and fresh label. Maybe some members were squeamish but they got over it. I can’t terrorize the orchestra – no one can anymore! It has to be more collaborative. As a minority in music, that gives me an advantage to have a different perspective. Also, I’ve gotten certain opportunities because I’m a woman. When I conducted the Algerian National Orchestra – and I’m the only person from the United States to do that – to celebrate their 50 years of independence, they told me they specifically wanted a woman to conduct them for the celebration so that’s how I got the gig. Concordia, that Alsop hosts, is another great experience for woman conductors because that’s who she specifically seeks out.”

9. How do you feel about receiving benefits like these due to your gender?

“Honestly it’s a little bit of a drag. It’s a drag that people put me on their top list of women conductors and not on their top list, period. There are so many great white male conductors who are unemployed and they should be given a chance like me. I was a conducting fellow at Aspen and Tanglewood – two old boys clubs - and it was the audience members, not the musicians, who came up and told me how weird it was that a woman was conducting. It’s the audience members and outsiders who notice things like that, not the musicians. We still do have something to overcome though. In the conductor roster of CAMI [Columbia Artists Management Inc.], there may be 100 conductors there and 2 of them are women. This roster, however, gives you positions. One manager in New York said to me he wouldn’t take me on because he already had his “woman conductor.” I was grateful for his honesty! It meant I don’t have to work better, but just to keep slugging.”

“Throughout most of my career there’s just been a handful of women conductors and we’ve all known each other. But now I hear of women

conducting who I've never heard before. This is just showing that the floodgates are opening. I don't know half of the women conducting anymore. There are so many women conductors, Alsop asked me to adjudicate Taki Concordia. I don't even know Susanne Mälkki and she's taking the world by storm. I've actually liked being the only woman candidate for music director. I'm a novelty and that stands out immediately, but this probably won't happen anymore. When I auditioned for the Reno Phil, I was one of three women candidates and that's never happened before. That was the most I've ever seen before. Because you are the face of the orchestra, you are more subject to ageism than anything. Men describe this. There's a push for younger people. Gustavo Dudamel started this in the LA Phil. You used to be able to conduct Boston when you turned 60, but the person they just hired now is 33 years old. It's now less fashionable to be of a certain age. It's just like any Hollywood or Broadway production – you have to have a specific, bright, loud, voice or you're not getting the part. There's a very narrow profile of acting. Whether trickle down happens to lower ranked orchestras remains to be seen.”

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